

New Year's Thoughts, 1968

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THE DISMAL RECORD

Eight years ago, on January 1, 1960, the clock on the *Bulletin* cover was moved a few minutes back in recognition, we said then, "of the growth, in the preceding decade, of understanding that the advent of nuclear weapons had made war between major technological nations irrational." A year later the outcome of the Cuban crisis seemed to confirm this judgment: faced with the threat of nuclear war, the Soviet Union withdrew its missiles, and the United States promised not to renew assaults on Cuba.

An interval of half-hearted East-West rapprochement followed. But it did not go fast, and it did not go far. It was enough, however, to loosen the rigidity of the two ideological power camps. A trend back to international anarchy ensued, with each nation pursuing again its own "national interest."

De Gaulle's France and Mao's China led the way. Both devoted enormous efforts to the development of nuclear weapons as a visible sign of their sovereignty, and a guarantee of their freedom of action.

Stirrings of military nationalism appeared all over the globe. India and Pakistan went to war in 1965; Israel and the Arab countries did the same in 1967. And the United States was already embarked on a growing military intervention in Southeast Asia, without the U.N. label that had so irritated American nationalists in the Korean conflict.

A return to international anarchy had followed very quickly the end of World War I. After World War II it took a little longer. The blasts that leveled Hiroshima and Nagasaki, incinerating a hundred thousand human beings, were not as easily forgotten as the booms of the Big Berthas, or the year-long slaughter in the trenches around Verdun. But when the Cuban crisis was over, and no nuclear bombs went off, the belief spread that these would never again be used in war. And if so, did they not provide an "umbrella" under which nations could resume the pursuit of "national interests" by any other means, including if need be, aerial bombs, tear gas, and napalm?

By January 1965 the hopes that had caused the *Bulletin* clock to be moved back in 1960 were fading. But the editor was urged to give the new American administration time to show its hand. Was the new President not elected with the enthusiastic support of American scientists, receiving an overwhelming majority over an Air Force reserve general who embodied traditional nationalist thinking?

But the new President, although he had once sat at the feet of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was not an in-

spired world leader, able to stem the rising tide of nationalism. He had inherited American commitment to defend an anti-communist perimeter threatened in Vietnam—a logical succession to American involvement in Korea. True, the geographical and political situation in Vietnam was much less favorable than in Korea. Instead of an easily fortifiable, hundred-mile-long line from sea to sea, a thousand-mile-long, indefensible jungle frontier; instead of a crusty old veteran fighter for Korean independence, a choice of ambitious officers, most of whom had fought with the French against the national revolution; instead of communist politicians imported by the Soviet troops to North Korea, a victorious leader in the war against the French.

Still, in terms of power politics, the second intervention was the logical consequence of the first. The decision President Johnson made was one any tradition-bound President would have made—to fight it out rather than to risk a disintegration of the American sphere of influence in East Asia.

This is not said to justify the American policy in Vietnam, but merely to suggest that a valid alternative to this policy cannot be found in the framework of traditional power politics—a framework in which retreat and appeasement inevitably lead to fighting later, and probably under more difficult conditions. For a true alternative, a new framework is needed—a policy in which building the world community is given a higher priority than winning the contest for spheres of economic, political, and ideological influence.

The need for restructuring the international society seems clear at the end of a great war, whether in 1918 or 1945. But years go by, and nations return to self-centered pursuit of divergent national interests, until this pursuit leads them again into a deadly confrontation.

But such confrontations mankind cannot again afford. The breakaway from history now has to be sought in the doldrums of "politics as usual." Can it succeed? As of January 1968, the record is dismal.

THE FAILURE OF THE LEADERSHIP

American political leaders will say indignantly that they have not remained narrow traditionalists. Did they not defy domestic criticism and offer aid to practically all needy nations? Did they not battle Congressional opposition year in and year out for greater foreign aid appropriations? Did they not pour American money into Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia? Did they not send Peace Corpsmen to teach English and child-rearing, hygiene and well-digging, to the remotest corners of the world? Did not American wheat rescue the

hungry in India in 1965 and 1966, as it did the hungry in the Ukraine in the 1920s?

All this is true. But it is also true that these constructive efforts have been made with a weak left hand, while the mighty right hand was extending and strengthening the American empire in the world—defeating the Soviet blockade in Berlin, reestablishing the violated truce line across Korea, training and paying allied armies, outdoing the Soviet Union in a multibillion dollar missile and bomb race. Even the two or three billions of dollars allocated to the space program are expressions of a will for victory in the race to the moon rather than signs of enlightened concern with mankind's desire to know more about its cosmic habitat.

Now, as the Vietnam war is beginning to pinch, Congress, offering no resistance to a \$30 billion military expenditure, thinks it's time to cut down the "nonessentials" such as foreign aid, urban rehabilitation, and the research budget, and the Administration offers no strong opposition.

It is not true that American resources are insufficient to support vast constructive efforts, even while financing the war in Vietnam. When a war comes, undreamed-of financial and technological resources suddenly become available to multiply many times the military appropriations and increase many fold the production of planes or ships. It is all a question of urgency or priorities, and it is in the weighing of priorities that this Administration, as well as its predecessors, has failed.

Whatever the pressure of war, it is still within American power to hold the constructive aims above those of destruction. Yet we easily find \$2 billion monthly for military ends, but fail to find the few millions (and to organize the effort) needed for decent resettlement, feeding, protecting the health, and securing the education of the millions of people our military operations have displaced. What could have been made in the last decades, what can be made even now, if America's wealth, America's technological manpower and know-how, were invested as liberally in constructive tasks as they are invested in fighting the war!

As other nations are settling back into the grooves of self-serving national policies, America is failing to show the vision, the will, and the leadership to make our tentative international programs grow and ultimately to become the main content of world politics—as if they were not our main hope for the future, but fringe embellishments of power politics.

It is always too late and too little. A Lower Mekong development, pushed forward with all the immense American technological power, could have perhaps forestalled the civil war in Vietnam and prevented the division of Laos. But American commitment of \$1 billion to this program came only when the war in Vietnam was beyond the point of no return. Plans for provision of fresh water to convert deserts into pastures, pushed ahead with a will several years ago, could have perhaps forestalled the Israel-Arab war and put nations of this area onto the path of constructive cooperation. Building the Aswan dam in cooperation with the Russians could have perhaps prevented the sharpening of the contest

between the countries for influence in the Near East.

The Administration may have erred in committing American manpower to a war in a politically and geographically unprofitable area; perhaps a less committed leadership could extricate the United States. But this tactical error, if any, is not where the failure of American postwar policy lies, and extrication is not how it can be truly repaired.

The great failure, the crime before the future generations of mankind, has been not a sin of commission, but a sin of omission: a failure to stem the worldwide trend toward pre-atomic "normalcy" by an imaginative, large-scale use of American power and wealth, to lead in a worldwide mobilization of technical, economic, and intellectual resources for the building of a viable world community.

The day of reckoning may be approaching not in the form of American withdrawal and communist takeover in the Far East, but in a wave of world hunger, and the accompanying surge of world anarchy, predicted by many thoughtful analysts for the next decade.

THE SINS OF THE OPPOSITION

The Vietnam war has created grave dissension in America. A large part of the academic community have turned away from the Administration they helped to install three years earlier.

The ethical and emotional basis of this opposition is admirable—as was that of the students at Oxford who adopted, in the thirties, a resolution never again to fight "for king and country." It expresses a healthy revulsion against extending into the scientific civilization the barbaric traditions of the past; against misusing man's love for his people and his country to force him to participate in mass murder.

This revulsion is much more widespread and stronger now than it was 30 years ago. It is clearly nonsensical, if not criminal, to appeal to patriotic devotion and the fighting spirit of youth; as if they were being called to prove their mettle in hand-to-hand fighting, rather than to destroy innocent people by the hundreds by burning them in the sticky flow of napalm, or by the millions by exploding thermonuclear missiles over "enemy" cities—or to die themselves and to sacrifice their families in a mass elimination of humans as if they were cockroaches.

The outburst of Oxford students encouraged the German militarists into believing in England's decadence, and helped to unleash World War II. Those same students then joined the RAF and turned the tide in the battle of England.

Now, we are told, the marches and the riots of the pacifist youth also encourage the enemy to think that American society is in decay. And yet, even more than in the days of the Oxford resolution, the young men who burn their draft cards represent the sound instinct of mankind clamoring for survival. But it is also true that much of the power in the world is now, as it was in the thirties, in the hands of men convinced that they have the right—in the service of a political ideal, or for the sake of their personal power—to send millions to die and to kill other millions; and peace hangs by the slen-

der thread of mutual deterrence. This places heavy responsibility on the political and intellectual leadership of those who oppose war. The liberal and intellectual leaders of France and England did fail before World War II; they had refused to see the reality of the German drive for power; our present leaders deceive themselves and others about the realities of today's world.

The air resounds with speeches, the magazine pages are filled with articles proposing easy, honorable ways out of the Vietnam deadlock. Informed, closely reasoned criticisms of America's action in Vietnam by men as respected as Senator Fulbright or Professor Galbraith end with proposals which make one ask: On what planet have these men lived in the last decades? We hear proposals for a U.N.-supervised, free vote in South Vietnam (or even in all Vietnam); for coalition government in Saigon uniting all Vietnamese groups; for a peace conference to settle the future of all Southeast Asia, where men from Saigon, from the NLF, and from Hai-phong will sit down together with the Chinese, the Russians, and the Americans.

The ultimate solution, we hear, should be "neutralization" of the whole area. Neutralization has a clear meaning for countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, or Austria, or even Yugoslavia, located between two powerful camps. But what could be the meaning of neutrality in Southeast Asia, after the withdrawal of American power from the continent of Asia? Professor Morgenthau is at least more realistic when he says that whenever China was strong, Southeast Asia had been in its sphere of influence, and that it is wrong policy for the United States to contest it!

I read recently an article by Mary McCarthy on Vietnam, together with Senator Fulbright's eight-point proposal. How convincing the moral judgment of a sensitive writer, and how remote from reality the proposals of a politician!

In proposing cheap but "honorable" solutions in Vietnam, those leaders of political opposition smooth the path to new American isolationism—to end in another rude, if not catastrophic, awakening. Lloyd George once proposed a round-table conference, with Lenin and Trotsky joining the leaders of the White Armies on an island in the Marmara Sea, to end peacefully the Russian civil war. The Western allies once succeeded in finding an "honorable" solution to the conflict between the two Polish governments. The head of the Polish exile government in London, Mikolajczyk, was invited to join the Moscow-sponsored Warsaw cabinet—only to be forced to resign soon afterward. The present governments in Hungary and East Germany are "coalition governments." Can we deceive ourselves that a cardboard structure of this kind, erected to facilitate American withdrawal from Vietnam, will have any real significance?

The real short-range alternatives in Vietnam are: continuation of the war—whose success, under the geographical and political conditions, is remote—or withdrawing, leaving the power to the NLF without delusions about the consequences of such withdrawal, about the probable new crises to ensue in Korea, Laos, and Thailand, if not in Malaya and Burma.

More important long-range alternatives face America, whether she stays in Vietnam or not; and whether, after withdrawal she returns to fight, if need be, in Korea, Laos, or Thailand; or, sobered by Vietnam, she leaves the whole area alone. The triple alternatives are: continued participation in the contest for world power; retiring into "fortress America"; or putting America's world involvement onto a new track—investing, with a will and with whatever sacrifice may be needed, our unique wealth and technological power, in closing the gap between the prosperous city civilization of the North and Lin Piao's "world village" of the South.

It has been said that each government has the opposition it deserves. The American government of today offers a mirage of approaching military victory in Vietnam and subsequent withdrawal to build the "great society" at home. This has engendered an opposition that is equally reluctant to face realistically the situation, to proclaim the need for a radical change rather than a mere readjustment of American world policy—not retrenchment and isolationism, but a different and perhaps more costly, but more creative American involvement in the future of mankind.

James Reston, in the *New York Times*, recently wrote:

Are they [the American people] really for the vast economic aid appropriations that have to be voted to avoid anarchy in other parts of the world, or are they bored or even disgusted with foreign aid? Do they really believe that we are on the verge of a new class war between the rich white nations and the poor non-white nations?

His answer is that the American people don't even want to think about these questions. "They want to preach at home and abroad, but will not pay the price." Neither the American government nor its opposition has risen above this popular attitude. To say that, in a democratic country, they cannot do so would mean to despair of the viability of democracy in the age of science!

There is little reason to feel sanguine about the future of our (and the whole Western) society on the world scale. There is a mass revulsion against war, yes; but no sign of conscious intellectual leadership in a rebellion against the deadly heritage of international anarchy. There is no broad recognition of the breathtaking perspectives of the scientific revolution—from all-destroying nuclear and biological war, likely if the international anarchy continues; from unprecedented world hunger, inevitable if man's procreation and food production are not brought into harmony by rational effort, to practically unlimited supply of energy, fresh water, food, shelter, and clothing for all—if stable peace is maintained and worldwide constructive cooperation is established.

In sad recognition that the past six years have brought mankind no closer to choosing the creative path, but have brought it farther down the road to disaster, the *Bulletin* clock is moved, on this sad New Year's Day, closer to midnight.